TALK IT OUT

A Parent's Guide to Kids and Smoking

Table of Contents

3 Beginning With You!
- Myths and Misconceptions
- A Parent's Place
- No Simple Answers

4 Kids and Smoking: A Fatal Attraction
- Ages and Stages
- Smoking as a Powerful Device
- Why Kids Start
- Why They Continue to Smoke

7 Making the Connection
- Staying in Sync
- Communicating Values
- Control
- The Art of Listening

9 Talking It Out
- Honesty
- Credibility
- Composure
- Information
- When You Catch Them Smoking

12 But I Smoke ... What Can I Do?
- Greater Risk
- Power to Make a Difference
- Talking With Your Kids

13 Moving Forward

Pointers for Parents

5 Nothing But the Facts

6 Butting Out

8 Lighting Up
- How to Get the Conversation Going

11 Talking Tips

12 Biting Your Tongue:
- Phrases to Avoid

14 Over a Barrel

15 Resources Within Reach

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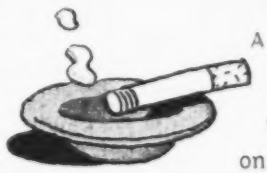
Beginning With You!

As a parent, you know the job of raising kids includes great joys and disappointments. It's filled with pride and worries and uncertainty. You help your children reach and pass milestones. And you have already put a lot of energy into keeping your children out of harm's way.

But now they may be about to do something that kills 45,000 people a year in Canada. Something that has huge costs, from lost work time to health care costs and loved ones lost to death and disease. The problem is, you won't be there to stop them. They will make their own decisions about smoking.



How can you help your children make the right choice?

That's where this booklet comes in. It gives you information about why kids smoke and how you can prepare yourselves to talk it out with your children. The focus is on pre-teens because it is during this time in children's lives that they are most likely to come into contact with smoking. However, parents of teenagers and of children about to enter the pre-teen years will also find the booklet useful.

Myths and Misconceptions

Misconceptions about what makes kids start smoking are common. Peer pressure and rebelling against parents are often mentioned. But these reasons are really too simple to explain a complex behaviour. Understanding the behaviour will put you in a better position to talk to your kids about it.

A Parent's Place

Parents — even those who smoke themselves — can and do have an impact on whether or not their kids smoke.

Of all the people who influence your children about smoking, you are the best one to give a genuine, emotional message of caring and love. At school, kids learn facts. From peers, kids feel social pressures. But their parents can bring smoking down to a personal level.

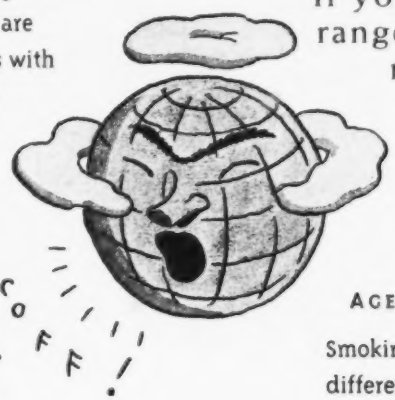
Imagine the case of one 12-year-old girl

who faces the tough decision of choosing between two groups of friends. The smokers are older, dress more stylishly, seem mature and sophisticated, are attracting boys and going to parties. She views the non-smokers as young and immature, less popular and so far unnoticed by boys. What this girl needs is the gentle, guiding hand of someone who understands her problem, someone who can help her sort out the pros and cons of both choices and see the benefits of not smoking. That someone is her parent, someone like you.

No Simple Answers

Like other difficult issues you face as a parent, smoking brings no simple answers. Kids are different. What works with one may not work at all with another.

But out of the experiences of educators, social groups, health care professionals, parents and children, come some guiding principles for how to connect with your kids at this important age — and some practical ideas for how to talk with them about smoking.



As you try to raise your kids to be smoke-free, accept the fact there may be problems. Your children may try smoking. But you can provide them with powerful messages. You can help build their determination to stay away from smoking or to reject it once they have tried it.

The information in this booklet should help you along the way.

Kids and Smoking: A Fatal Attraction

Along the journey of growing up, your children carry needs, emotions, thoughts and opinions. If you understand the range and depth of their reasons for smoking, you will be better prepared to approach your children on the subject.

Ages and Stages

Smoking takes on different meanings at different ages.

Up to about age 9, children have a strong moral view of the world based on what their parents, teachers and other role models tell them. They sort things out easily according to what's good and bad. Generally smoking falls on the "bad" list.

By the time children reach 10 to 12, smoking can take on meaning as a way for pre-teens to fit in and define themselves. Not surprisingly, many at this age will experiment with smoking.

When they enter high school, children find themselves in a new social situation in which they are very young and ill at ease.

As they try to create their own identities, smoking can appear to be a useful device. It seems to make sense of this new social order and a child's place in it. Children can also be attracted to smoking at other times of transition, such as when they move to a new home or school.

Even parents who have open communication with their children — and whose children strongly reject smoking — need to be pay close attention as their children move from one stage to another. These are the times when the temptation to smoke is greatest.

Smoking as a Powerful Device

As children travel through the stages and uncertainty of youth, they ask themselves questions. Who am I? Where do I fit? What will I become? In searching for answers, they may use smoking in the same way they use music, clothing and posters — as a way to define who they are.

Managing moods Cigarettes are used in the belief they will calm nerves and ease stress. They are used to sort out and gather thoughts, to relieve boredom, to gear up for a social event, to sink into a dark mood, to "zone out" and drift away from troubles.

Defining an image Romantic images in the media suggest to children that smoking somehow makes them look and feel tough. So by smoking, they protect themselves from criticism or attack at a very sensitive stage in their development.

Many images of "cool" in popular culture come with cigarette in hand. It is also a way of looking sophisticated, as a young teen takes on all the airs of smoking.

POINTERS FOR PARENTS

Nothing But the Facts

Be familiar with some facts about smoking, but sprinkle that information sparingly. Some children will be turned off by facts that don't seem relevant. Others appreciate cold, hard statistics that they can use in their own arguments against smoking.

You can use facts by saying actions have consequences, and here are the consequences of smoking.

- The average smoker will die about 9 years earlier earlier than similar non-smokers.
- Tobacco smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals. Many are known to be harmful, cancer causing substances, and include tar, nicotine, carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, hydrogen, cyanide and benzene.
- A Canadian dies every 12 minutes of a tobacco related disease.
- In 2003, 28% of Saskatchewan teens between the ages of 15-19 were current smokers as compared to 31% in 1999.
- One tree is lost for every 300 cigarettes manufactured.
- Smoking hurts young people's physical fitness in terms of both performance and endurance - even among young people trained in competitive running.
- The resting heart rates of young adult smokers are two to three beats per minute faster than non-smokers.
- Nicotine increases a baby's heart rate and breathing movements. Some of the chemicals passed on through the mother's blood are known to cause cancer.

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/tobacco/index.html

Health Canada - Go Smoke Free
April 7, 2005

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You can use facts by saying actions have consequences, and here are the consequences of smoking.

- The average smoker will die about 8 years earlier earlier than similar non-smokers.
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MOVING INTO ADULTHOOD Children smoke to look and feel older. When their friends start smoking, children may feel afraid that they'll be left behind on a journey that looks quite adventurous.

SEPARATING FROM OTHERS Children use smoking to separate themselves from parents, from the school system and from younger children. Smoking draws a line in the sand and brings children's growing independence into sharp focus.

A SOCIAL PASSPORT Smoking is often used as a way into a social situation, as a means of fitting in and finding friends. For instance, children may know where they fit according to whom they trade cigarettes with and to whom they owe cigarettes. Cigarettes are valuable currency in the business of building friendships.

WHY KIDS START

When faced with smoking, some pre-teens cannot resist trying it. Why?

❖ For some children, especially between the ages of 11 and 13, it is socially important to have tried smoking. Smoking for the first time becomes a topic of conversation, and children who cannot talk about the excitement, mischief and side effects may feel left out. That's why they may try smoking. Happily, many will reject it at this point — perhaps because of its bad taste and side effects or because they feel secure enough to go on without it.

POINTERS FOR PARENTS

Butting Out

Children often find their own ways out of smoking. You can't turn your children into star athletes, but you can suggest they consider the effect smoking has on their lives. You can help them find their own reasons not to smoke.

Health fears A clear and graphic sense of the health risks is enough for some kids to resist smoking, particularly when smoking-related illness is close to them.

Athletics For the athletically inclined, the physical demands and social expectations of their activities are an incentive to be smoke-free.

Changes Sometimes a new school or new city is an opportunity for a child to make a clean break from the ties of smoking.

Lifestyle choices When children can choose one group of friends over another, they may have the strength to choose a non-smoking group if they think it represents a better life and better group of people.

No longer a social necessity Older teens may mature to the point where they see what they were using smoking for — to look cool or be sophisticated. They now have the self-confidence and sense of identity to no longer need smoking.

The cost Some kids would rather spend their money on the latest fashions to help define themselves than on cigarettes.

Smoking as socially unacceptable Older teens and young adults may discover that smoking is "out" in a new peer group — for instance at university.

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❖ Children are convinced they won't get cancer and if they do, they'll be much older when life is barely worth living anyway. They believe they can quit any time; only other people get addicted.

❖ Young smokers typically grow up in households and among family and friends where there is lots of smoking. To them, it seems everyone is doing it, so why not them?

❖ Even if you don't smoke yourself, your children can easily buy cigarettes in the schoolyard and among friends, although federal and provincial laws prohibit children from buying tobacco.

❖ While peer pressure can't fully explain why children smoke and continue to smoke, it does play a role. But rather than friends demanding they try smoking, children themselves will choose to do whatever it takes to fit in. They go along with smoking because they don't want to lose their friends.

Why They Continue to Smoke

Many of the reasons kids start smoking are reasons they continue. As they begin to smoke more frequently, smoking becomes a more and more useful device.

But there are also other reasons to continue.

❖ Starting as social smokers, many children rarely buy cigarettes, seldom smoke heavily or even inhale. By getting what they consider to be the social benefits of smoking without the health risks of long-term heavy smoking, they see no reason to quit. And because they think they are in complete control of their smoking, they don't believe they'll ever become regular smokers (although many will).

❖ Although few young smokers will admit to being addicted, they do gradually become dependent on cigarettes. They arrange their schedules around smoking, require a cigarette after a class, use a cigarette to calm nerves, and so on.

❖ Young smokers are surrounded by people who have tried to quit and failed. Lacking confidence at a young age, children won't try something that seems very hard to do.

❖ Some young smokers are deeply committed to smoking. For them, smoking involves defiance and the anger of youth.

Against all these powerful reasons to smoke, you come face to face with your children. They need your perspective, your love and your guidance to create and maintain their own reasons for not smoking.

Making the Connection

As a parent, you may be wondering how to approach your kids on the topic of smoking. Use the success you have had with other issues to guide you on this one.

Generally, the more connected you are to their lives, the more open and honest your conversation can be.

Connecting with your kids means getting involved in their day-to-day activities, being aware of their friends and interests, responding to

POINTERS FOR PARENTS

Lighting Up

How to Get the Conversation Going

Extracting more than one-syllable responses from your children may be like pulling teeth. But here are some ways into a conversation you might try.

Smoking in society Many kids are smart about the media and hate to be manipulated. The way society depicts smoking may spark a conversation. Look at magazine advertisements with your children and talk about how the advertiser is showing happy, beautiful people with cigarettes. Then talk about the controversial fact that cigarettes are an addictive product sold legally.

Personal and family stories Talk about family members who have smoking-related illnesses. Talk about the attempts you or other family members have made to quit smoking. Perhaps relatives or family friends have interesting stories to tell that would give a message about smoking to your children.

Direct questions Try asking specific questions in a non-threatening way. Are the kids at school smoking? Are any of their friends smoking? How do they feel about it? What have they seen and heard in school about smoking? Do they have any questions about smoking? The idea is not to fire questions at your children but to open up a conversation. Listen fully and carefully to their answers.

their moods and listening to their opinions. Know the rhythms of your children's lives and you will more easily sense when something is wrong.

Staying in Sync

Adolescence brings dramatic yet natural highs and lows for both parents and children.

Sometimes sharing an interest helps you stay in synch with your children.

Or you can stay connected with their fashions, their music, their friends. Watch their favourite sports match or television program. You don't have to like it, but it's important not to judge. The father who dismisses rap music as "crap" will not connect with his children in the way he might if he were to ask them why they like it and why it's important to them.

Quite often it's enough to recognize some good in their activities and interests even if you don't go along with the whole package.

Communicating Values

As hard as it may be to believe as they go through adolescence, kids eventually take on values similar to those of their parents.

By your actions, you let your kids know what's important to you. Of course, no one can be a perfect role model. And you don't need to be to influence your children. As parents, you keep trying and talking about what matters most to you and why — without heavy lectures.

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You may find some family stories are useful to talk about strengths (and

weaknesses) of character or to describe a lesson learned.

CONTROL

Parents can't always control what happens to their children and what they do — even at young ages. You can help guide them in a certain direction by letting them know what behaviour is acceptable to you and what is not. By the time they are pre-teens, you won't be there to make decisions for them.

THE ART OF LISTENING

Good communication is a two-way street. It involves talking, but even more important, listening. If parents don't listen, how will children learn to listen? How comfortable will they feel expressing their views and sharing what is happening to them?

Yet listening is a difficult and seldom-taught skill. How can you do it more effectively? Here are some suggestions.

- Don't use listening as the wind-up before the curve ball. In other words, don't jump in to argue your own point as soon as your child pauses for a breath.
- Be patient. Listen fully to what your children have to say.
- Try to put yourself in their shoes. What are they going through right now — trying to fit in, coping with a new school, meeting new friends? How might they be feeling?
- Test your understanding. As parents well know, what kids say is not always what they mean. Try to listen to the feelings underneath the words. When you're not sure of meaning, test your understanding — state what you think you're hearing, and ask them if you've got it right.
- Ask questions. It may sound obvious, but if you're asking questions you're giving yourself the best opportunity to listen.

As you encourage your children to share more and more information, you'll understand their situation better. You'll be connected to their world.

Listening with interest to what someone says is one of the finest ways to communicate your high regard. By listening, you are saying "I respect you. I value what you think." There is no better way to make your children feel worthwhile.

And the more your children value themselves, the more likely they are to say, "No, thanks. That's not me," when that cigarette is offered.

Talking It Out

If you connect with your kids in other ways and listen carefully to what they say, the contact you make with them about smoking will be more effective.

It's easier to lead into a conversation if the topic of smoking has been raised in the past. When your children are young, they may often come into contact with smoke. You can use the chance to say "it smells bad" and "it can make people sick."

By the time your children are pre-teens, however, talking about smoking may be

awkward, especially if your child has already tried smoking. Here are some things to keep in mind.

Honesty

As a parent you should share your feelings with your children in an open and honest way. Let them know exactly what you think of smoking and why.

Credibility

There's no point in denying the powerful images of smoking. The media and advertisers — not to mention the kids in the schoolyard — portray a pretty glamorous picture of smoking.

Your children may believe your message more if you have some facts at hand. Try to use fresh facts. Something they have not already heard may work to persuade them not to smoke.

Use facts wisely. You probably won't convince your children that only 10 per cent of people their age smoke if the smoking rate among their friends is much higher. Nor does it do much good to talk about the risk of dying. Children are likely to counter such facts with their own "proof" ("Gee, Aunt Bess lived to 86 and she smoked a pack a day...").

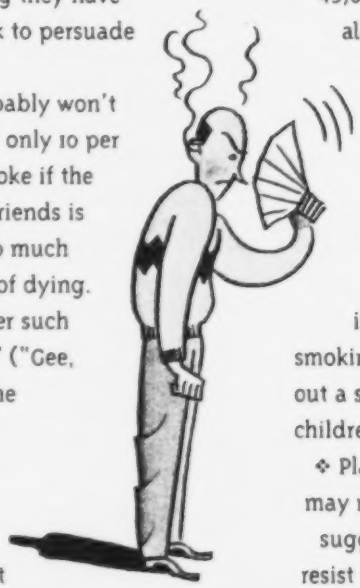
Composure

No matter how much you feel provoked, try not to get into a heated argument. You don't want your conversation to break down into anger and accusations.

- Ask questions to help you understand their situation. Use a tone that's neutral. Don't sound accusing or disbelieving.
- Listen carefully to your children. Listening is not about convincing them their arguments are wrong.
- Talk about the behaviour, not the person. Freely express your objections to smoking, but don't label your children's friends or your children as bad.
- Talk to others. You may find it much easier to keep a cool head when talking about smoking with other people's kids — nieces or nephews, for example. This will help you understand the behaviour better and give you a chance to practise talking about it.

Information

- Give some information. Yes, your children are young and feel invincible, but a few facts may make them think twice about smoking. Tell them smoking causes 45,000 deaths a year in Canada alone — a community the size of Prince Albert (or some town or towns they know). Make a point of finding and keeping statistics about smoking.
- Brainstorm and role-play. Your children may like your help in finding ways to say no to smoking. Try out some responses. Act out a situation together and ask your children how it felt to be in it.
- Plant a few thoughts. Some children may rise to the challenge if you suggest it takes enormous strength to resist smoking.



When You Catch Them Smoking

Imagine you've spotted your daughter outside the schoolyard smoking. Or you've found a cigarette in your son's pocket. Suddenly smoking is no longer just an idea you may be talking about. It's really happening.

How do you react? Here are some suggestions.

❖ Keep cool. Don't react when you're angry. You may say things you regret and make the situation worse. If you need to, say you disapprove and walk away. Take some time to cool off and prepare for your conversation.

❖ Begin with factual statements. For instance, "I saw you smoking outside the schoolyard today. Smoking is unhealthy and can make you very sick."

❖ Ask questions. For instance, "How long have you been smoking?" "What is it about smoking you like or don't like?" Remind your children of any previous discussion you've had about smoking. Ask them what has changed. Or why they started.

Get them talking about the thoughts and feelings behind their smoking. If smoking is your children's ticket into a social group at school, ask them how they feel about that — do they think friendship should hinge on whether or not a person smokes or on other qualities about the person?

❖ Be honest and clear about your feelings toward smoking, and why you feel that way. For instance, "I know that smoking is unhealthy and I'm frightened for you. I care about you and don't want you to die." Express your love and caring in whatever words you feel comfortable with.

Say you think smoking is a dangerous addiction, a disgusting habit, or a stupid way to spend money. The important thing is to be straightforward.

POINTERS FOR PARENTS

Talking Tips

Having trouble talking with your kids? Know that you're not alone, and keep these tips in mind.

Be patient and keep trying. Be prepared for rejection. Let a conversation that isn't working stop. But pick it up again when the time seems better. Even if the conversation is not going the way you want, the fact that you care enough to try will have an impact.

Be yourself. Don't feel you have to be a perfect role model. Be honest in the way you present yourself and your feelings. Share your convictions and beliefs about smoking.

Listen. And listen some more. Try to hear the struggles and difficulties of their day-to-day lives and understand their attitude toward smoking in that larger context. Put yourself in their shoes.

Don't judge yourself or get discouraged with yourself as a parent if things don't go well. These are tough years and communication is difficult. Keep extending the hand that says you care in your own way.

Be sincerely interested in what they are doing and saying. You don't have to agree with it all, but be attentive.

Start from a personal experience, perhaps your own. Share something real and create a meaningful conversation around that.

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Share something real and create a meaningful conversation around that.

❖ Don't get personal. Your children should know it's smoking you find offensive, not them. Similarly, while their behaviour may shock or disappoint you, don't look at it as your own personal failure. Many kids try smoking.

❖ Continue the conversations. Results don't happen overnight. Return to the subject when the timing seems right. Keep talking with your children about what importance smoking has for them. If you are or were a smoker, talk about what importance you attach(ed) to smoking and how difficult it is to give up.

Above all, recognize that if your children have just started smoking, there may be time to influence them before it becomes an addiction.

But I Smoke ... What Can I Do?

Parents who smoke sometimes feel uneasy talking with their kids about the subject.

If you're a smoker, you may feel guilty about your smoking. You may think you can't affect your children's behaviour. Or

POINTERS FOR PARENTS

Biting Your Tongue: Phrases to Avoid

When you say ...
They may ...

"You're my kid and you're going to do what I say ..."
Begin to smoke regularly as a means of separating themselves from you.

"You are forbidden to hang around that crowd ..."
Stick with the crowd out of a need to rebel against you and fit in with them.

"Smoking will kill you ..."
Ignore or challenge you because they feel unbeatable.

"You're weak to smoke ..."
Lose their sense of worth and use smoking to feel tough and adult.

"You're foolish to go along with the gang ..."
Feel they're not loved at home and feel a greater need to be with the gang.

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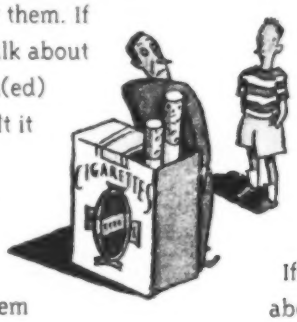

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you may not want to start a conversation about smoking because you feel hypocritical.

As valid as these feelings are, research proves that even parents who smoke can influence whether or not their children become smokers.

Greater Risk

As a smoker, you'll want to make a special effort to talk to your kids about smoking because they may be at even greater risk than other children.

Evidence suggests that children whose parents smoke are likely to start smoking earlier and smoke more frequently than children who grow up in smoke-free households. Why? Partly because cigarettes are more available and children may see smoking as acceptable.

But there may be other reasons too. Children of smoking parents have seen first-hand how smoking is used to cope with stress. And possibly their lungs have been conditioned by second-hand smoke — when they try that first cigarette, they may not feel the side effects as much as other children.

This does not mean your children will smoke. In fact, some children of smoking parents are the strongest opponents of smoking. They may have seen the ill health or death of someone close to them. Or they have seen first-hand from their parents how difficult it is to quit. They may simply view it as a disgusting habit.

Power to Make a Difference

Be encouraged by the fact that you do have the power to help your children choose not to smoke. In fact, a recent study showed that children of parents who smoke and discourage their children from smoking are twice as likely as the average to become smokers. However, children whose smoking parents do not actively discourage them from smoking are seven times more likely to smoke.

You have a chance to help shape your children's behaviour. Use it.

Talking With Your Kids

The most effective way to talk with your kids is to be completely honest.

Tell your children you wish you didn't smoke. Tell them how and why you got started. Without excusing the behaviour, tell them there is much more proof today of the dangers of smoking and the harm from second-hand smoke than there was when you were young. Share with them the power of addiction and the difficulty of quitting.

You might use this as an opportunity to try to quit smoking yourself. Each time you try, you learn more about your need for cigarettes. This can help when you're ready to let go of cigarettes completely.

Be very candid and blunt in asking your children not to make the same mistakes you have. Don't be afraid that you'll appear weak. In fact, your children will probably appreciate your honesty and openness.

Moving Forward

Talk with your kids about smoking in many conversations over a long period of time.

Between ages 13 and 17, your children will be struggling to create their own identities. Accept the fact that for some children,

smoking will be part of that effort. However, just because your children may have tried smoking doesn't mean they'll be smokers forever. Your job is to help them see why it's not a good choice.

If your children smoke regularly, they may go in one of two directions as they mature into young adults. They may drift away from smoking and no longer need it as a way to fit in. With good self-esteem, these young people may find the biggest obstacle to giving up the behaviour is their physical addiction.

Or they may settle into a deep smoking habit and lifestyle. In time, they may face strong reasons to quit: a non-smoking partner, a non-smoking workplace, health concerns, their own children and so on.

If your children don't smoke, recognize and reinforce that healthy choice whenever appropriate. Tell them that after all these years of watching out for their health and safety, you're pleased to see them protecting themselves from harm.

In the complex area of kids and smoking, a booklet like this can only go so far. In your community, you'll find plenty of other people and organizations that can help. Take advantage of these resources. They can point the way on what is a long and sometimes bumpy journey — the road to raising smoke-free kids.

POINTERS FOR PARENTS

Over a Barrel

If you smoke, your kids may throw all kinds of arguments at you. But don't get discouraged. Research shows that if you talk with your kids about smoking, they are much less likely to smoke than if you ignore the subject altogether.

When they say ...

"How can you tell me not to smoke when you've been doing it for over 20 years?"

You might respond ...

"It's because I know first-hand the dangers of smoking and because I love you that I'm so concerned."

"If you know all the dangers, why haven't you quit?"

"It's not easy to quit something you're addicted to. I've tried and I hope one day I'll succeed. I don't want to see you go through the same thing."

"You're really stupid to smoke."

"Smoking is stupid. I wish I didn't smoke. But it's also hard to stop once you start."

"If you really cared, you wouldn't be subjecting me to all this second-hand smoke."

"I (will) try not to smoke around you. I do love you and don't want to see you making the mistakes I have made."

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Resources Within Reach

Do you need more information on young people and smoking? Do you need more help in raising your children to be smoke-free? Here are some suggestions:

- Contact your Health Region for more information about what is happening in your community.
- Ask your child's schoolteacher, principal, or your school trustee or school board member to see what is being taught about tobacco prevention in the Health Curriculum.
- Visit your local library and ask them to search for videos and other resources.
- Contact any of the following health organizations for information about smoking prevention and/or smoking cessation.

Lung Association
of Saskatchewan
1231 - 8th Street East
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7H 0S5
1-800-566-LUNG (5864)
In Saskatoon: 343-9511
Internet: www.sk.lung.ca

Canadian Cancer Society
Saskatchewan Division
1910 McIntyre Street
Regina, Saskatchewan
S4P 2R3
1-877-977-HOPE (4673)
In Regina: 780-5822
Internet: www.cancer.ca

The Heart and Stroke
Foundation of Saskatchewan
279 - 3rd Avenue North
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7K 2H8
1-888-HSF-INFO (473-4636)
In Saskatoon: 244-2124
Internet: www.heartandstroke.ca

- If you have access to the internet:

  The National Clearinghouse on Tobacco and Health site provides information and links to other sites in Canada and other countries.

  http://www.ncth.ca/ncthweb.nsf

- You and your child might be interested in visiting the following internet sites together:

  Health Canada's Youth Site
  http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/tobacco/youth/index.html

  Tobacco Facts – British Columbia Ministry of Health

  http://www.tobaccofacts.org/

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